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THE FIRST FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN OUR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

To begin with, shall the first foreign language in our secondary schools be a *dead* language or a *living* language? To answer this question, we must go back and analyze historically the reason for the old position of Latin in the secondary schools.

In the early years Latin was absolutely necessary, as it was the only literary language. The teachers were largely monks and the instruction was from their mouths or the parchment. Latin was the only medium for studying any subject and this was true up to the time when printing came to be fully developed.

Then, too, there was the old English idea that the study of Latin was absolutely essential to the "British gentleman." There could be no education without a knowledge of Latin. The chief work of colleges and universities was training scholarly men for the church, the bar and the state. All these professions needed, or were supposed to need, a knowledge of Latin and Greek. They were thought to be indispensable for a study of ancient and modern civilization, even though only the "delicacies" are lost through translation.

Latin was required for entrance to college and university, and the high school was thus forced not only to require Latin but to commence with it. Of course, this statement applies with more force to the English secondary school and the eastern (American) high school, as our western high school has, almost from the beginning, been more democratic and more practical. It has existed for itself and not for the college, as was the case with the two former types of schools.

Another reason for the preferred place of Latin in our schools was the argument that the Latin pupils were better taught and prepared than the modern-language pupils. This, true as it was, was due, not to the fact that Latin has the best disciplinary value, but rather to the fact that the Latin teachers themselves were the best and most systematically prepared and, naturally, turned out better prepared pupils. The study of modern languages, on the other hand, is comparatively recent and came about rather suddenly, thus finding a dearth of teachers, most of whom were ill

prepared to teach, and consequently the results suffered by comparison.

The whole end of education was thought to be "culture" and only through the ancient languages could this culture be had. Education, too, was for the few rather than the masses. This idea, of course, was perfectly natural in the old absolute form of government, where the common people were practically overlooked, or considered unfit to be educated. Greece and Rome were the models. Only through them could one really learn. We were worshipers of the past and thought that there was no education but the classical education. The A. B. degree required Latin, and Art was used only in the narrowest sense.

If one cared to study a modern language, it must of necessity be preceded by Latin, as only with such a foundation could satisfactory progress be made in the modern language. (I plead guilty to having told many of my German and Spanish pupils this very thing, Latin was the older language and must precede the modern language in sequence of study.)

Having given some reasons why Latin should be the first language in our schools, I wish to take up the greater part of this paper in proving, on the contrary (first), that the first language should be a modern language, and (second) that the particular modern language should be Spanish.

The whole idea of education has radically changed in the last thirty-five years. We no longer look at the well educated man as one of the long-haired species, who holds himself aloof from the world and is somewhat "queer." The modern education is practical and "does things." Science has come to be the main thing (Herbert Spencer prophesied this 70 years ago); and the Great War has accentuated this to a high degree. The real objects are now: (*a*) cultivation of powers of observation through the senses, (*b*) training in recording correctly the accurate observations, both on paper and in the retentive memory, and (*c*) training in reasoning on the premises secured.

This change in education is not intended to crush out the "idealistic." Practical education is the only foundation on which idealistic achievements can be raised; to neglect the practical ends of education is foolishness; but to recognize no other is to degrade humanity. Culture and civilization are by-products of life; but like some other by-products they may yield a greater return than

the parent industry. (The great potash plant of San Diego during the war made all its profits, not on potash, but on TNT, a by-product.)

Our colleges are changing. The A. B. degree will soon only mark the conclusion of a supplementary course. Latin is not indispensable to the study of ancient civilization, great literatures, or ethical systems. Athens was not a real democracy; Rome was cruel; and the British Empire a far better model to study for government and law. Out of 76 leading colleges and universities of this country, only 38 of these require Latin at all, and nine of these, while requiring Latin for entrance, do not require a study of Latin at the higher institution of learning. If colleges require it for entrance but do not pursue it further, the classical road leads to a dead end.

The American educated generation of today is no less well equipped for life work; on the contrary, there is a higher standard. Business, farming, manufacturing, trading, and distributing have come to be, more and more, intellectual callings demanding good powers of observation, concentration, and judgment. Now our higher institutions of learning are called upon to train men for public service in new democracies, for a new medical profession, finance, journalism, transportation, manufacturing, new architecture, ship-building, railroads, agriculture, conservation of national resources, water supplies, distribution of light and power, and the practitioners of these new professions can profit in many directions by so many other studies that not all indiscriminately should be compelled to take Latin.

As to sequence, the cart has been put before the horse. The logical order is to go from the live to the dead (if we must go to the dead at all), to go from that of which we know most to that of which we know least. *Interest* is the *big* thing. If a student is once aroused to the delights of a modern language, he will the more easily and the more thoroughly devote himself to the dead language. As the average student will not take four years of Latin, but will more likely take four years of French or Spanish, if he is compelled to first take Latin he will drop it at the end of one or two years and then can get but one year of a modern language. The aim is, first, to get *one* language well in high school. But the Latinists say this sequence will crowd Latin out of the schools. I do not think, personally, that this would be any calamity.

If the student does not get the Latin in high school, he can better study *it* later in life alone or at college than he could the modern language, because he does not need to learn to *speak* the ancient language.

Therefore, only those really interested in Latin will take it, and a better grade of work in Latin will be the result. As things stand now, we have a hodge-podge: pupils starting one language in the ninth year who either drop it the next for an *easier* language or, worse, try to go on with it and also take an "easier" one, with the result that they get nowhere and have a useless mixture of nothing for their pains.

Only by spending four years on a modern language can a fairly good speaking knowledge be acquired. Therefore a modern language should be the first, as with this order only can we turn out *oral* exponents of the language. At the end of two years the student will know whether he wants to elect Latin or another modern language for the second language. If a modern language, it will be his second choice, in which case it will not be so important that he can only have two years in which to pursue it, but to offset this is the well-known fact that he will get in two years of the second language a far greater amount of learning than he secured in the first two years of the first language. If he elect Latin for the second language, two years will give him all the *practical* knowledge one gets from Latin anyway, to my way of thinking. He may never decide to take a second language. If so, far better be it that he have learned a *live* one, which he can put to practical use.

Lastly, they say Latin has the greater disciplinary value. While the time has been all too short to give a fair trial, I think it has been shown that we can get as much drill out of French or Spanish as Latin; furthermore, while we are drilling let it be on something we can all *use*. One might still get more discipline out of the study of Chinese, for that matter; but why drill on something impractical? There are no "easy" languages; it is merely that the difficulties are differently distributed. Also one can get more discipline out of four consecutive years in one language than in two, and, as I said before, the average pupil will not take four years of Latin.

We can never by school teaching provide for the needs of the nation. We can only turn out pupils well trained in one or more

languages and therefore prepared to make the best use of private study and of any chances of instruction and practice that may present themselves. By concentration only do we get the best results. Therefore it is plainly undesirable to start two languages at once. As a rule, two years should elapse before the second language be attempted. Latin is no longer considered necessary for any of the professions except the clerical.

What language of the modern languages should be first begun? This depends, naturally, on the country concerned. French holds a unique position for the British; Russian for the Germans; but for us of the United States, it seems to me, Spanish is by far the most logical one. It is the national language of 18 of our sister republics; and it is the language of all the countries of this continent, with one exception, over which we claim a special interest, in our "Monroe Doctrine." South America is the great field of future exploitation, and the commercial advantages of Spanish to the young American are wonderful. Why, even the British give to Spanish the greatest commercial value.

It is not only the language most spoken on this continent, but the foreign language of the country nearest us; more than that, it is the language spoken by a large number of the inhabitants of these United States, the inheritance of former days. We in the great Southwest come into almost daily contact with it, and every boy should know it. We owe much to Spain in discovery and colonization, in learning and many other things. She has given to the world much in science; she has carried the novel to the most complete realization and has, in general, a literature equal to French. But in comparison with French, for our boys and girls, there is only one answer and that is Spanish. Its names are common in many of our states; our children in their first history work come in contact with it; our interests are linked with those of all the American republics, and therefore, I say, let it be *Spanish*.

A. J. BARNES

ALHAMBRA HIGH SCHOOL
ALHAMBRA, CAL.